PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

WAR SUFFERERS'

RELIEF BULLETIN

"Not to be ministered unto, but to minister"

September, 1945 — Vol. I. No. 7

Entering Holland

By Peter J. Dyck

A few hours before leaving our Mennonite Center in London a message came from the Netherlands Government, which was at that time still sitting in London, to the effect that women were allowed to travel only on condition that they were drivers of vehicles. Of course Freda (Klassen Dyck) has been behind the wheel for many hundreds of miles in England but if one has not driven in the heart of London, if one has not driven a vehicle loaded to maximum capacity, and if one has not learned to take and keep one's appointed place in a vast military convoy then one has not yet done what the Netherlands Government asked Freda to do. How she did it is a story too long to tell here but I, sitting beside her all the time and watching her make her way through Piccadilly and an endless stream of sleepy London taxis, and observing the continued danger of having our convoy broken up by reckless American jeeps, know that she did infinitely better than some of the Dutch officers, one of whom gave up the struggle in despair and had his car towed by another. In this way we eventually reached the harbour from where we sailed the next morning.

We had hoped to disembark at Rotterdam, a port recently opened and only some fifty miles from Amsterdam, the city to which we were to proceed and in which we hoped to set up our headquarters, but instead we were taken to Ostend in Belgium, a distance of over 200 miles from Amsterdam. Ostend, being a city almost completely destroyed and resembling more an empty shell than a live city, was no place to leave our excess load. Accordingly we decided to make our way north at the rate of 25 m.p.h. taking with us the entire load consisting of everything from a sewing machine to a motorcycle and chests of tools to heavy boxes packed with medical supplies. When eventually we arrived in Amsterdam on Sunday, July 22, and unloaded our goods in one of the rooms of the oldest Mennonite Church in Holland, the church from which I am also writing this, it almost filled that little room. Surveying all we had brought along and thinking of the difficulties encountered in procuring these goods and in bringing them here one felt that something had been accomplished; but lifting one's eyes up to

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THIS ISSUE of the RELIEF BULLETIN *is taken up almost entirely with materials regarding relief conditions in Holland, particularly the situation in which Dutch Mennonites find themselves. A considerable amount of information has been received recently from Peter Dyck and consequently several of the articles in this issue are from his typewriter. Peter Dyck, his wife, Freda Klassen Dyck, and Elma Esau have now been in Holland well over a month representing the relief concerns of Mennonites in United States and Canada. Their headquarters are in Amsterdam at Singel 452.*

Of special interest to our readers, we believe, is the account on page eight of this issue of Brother Dyck's visit to the repatriation camp at Maastricht and his contact with the interned group of Russian Mennonites. Information regarding groups of displaced Mennonites in Europe is being received at Akron. We intend to release several reports in the October issue of the BULLETIN.

the new surroundings and the vast needs of the country to which we had come we realized that it was but a drop in an ocean of need. But we are safely here and now Elma Esau has also joined us and for that we are grateful. We also have our own transportation which is worth a fortune in itself. Now we are ready to begin.

Relief Situation

Our first contacts have naturally been with our own Mennonite people. We find that they have gone through everything that has been meted out to the peoples of the Netherlands, they have not been spared. Some of the Mennonite churches are completely destroyed, some are damaged, and many a Mennonite home that was is no more.

The food situation is not anything like it was in prewar days and not yet as good as that of England today. The need for clothing, shoes, bedding, and bicycle tires is greatest and offers no happy solution yet for some time. This winter will be hard for many or most civilians because of the lack of fuel. What little coal there is goes to the factories and even they receive it only on condition that they supply first the needs of the coal miners. Any relief which we intend to give to the peoples of Holland must obviously be given in this autumn and winter; after that they will likely be able to help themselves.

Need of Transportation

One of the greatest needs of today, but one which we are not in a position to remedy, is that of transportation. The most we can do, and absolutely must do if we are to be effective in our work, is to supply our own transportation, but we can do nothing about the hundreds of bridges which lie in the rivers and canals thus not only stopping all road traffic but blocking the water traffic as well. Nor can we do anything about the railway engines and the railway cars which have been either destroyed or taken out of the country.

It is painful having to drive, as I needs must, from place to place here and refuse to take along the people who throng the roadsides. Of course the car is always full and one takes whom one can, but to take them all one should be driving a whole fleet of cars. Thus I went, for example, from Amsterdam to Arnhem one day leaving here in the morning and finding several hundred people with outstretched hands at the city boundary. Passing many of them I saw in the crowd some old women and a nurse whom I intended to take along, but as soon as the car came to a stop people rushed in from all sides and the old ladies had no chance. When the car was full, there must have been some ten or fifteen people in it, the old ladies had just reached the door. I have picked up a whole family with little children, in the rain and at midnight, miles and miles from the place they intended to go to. A new bicycle if one could get it costs from three to five hundred dollars. Most bicycles are so old they fall to pieces and many of them have no tires at all. But now the war is over and everyone expects great things of the days which lie ahead.

Interest in Nonresistance

It is common knowledge that the Mennonites of Holland have long ago lost the nonresistant principle together with many of the characteristics peculiar to the old and simple way of life. But today there are signs of the pendulum swinging back once more and the leaders of some of the Mennonite Churches are giving serious thought to this vital question. One cannot at this stage predict the ultimate result nor be too optimistic about it, and the leaders here feel that whatever happens it must under no circumstances result in the splitting of the Mennonite Church, yet when we hear, as we did last Sunday, a sermon preached on the text, "This is my commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you," (John 15:12) and listen to such phrases as, "standing at the threshold of a new era in the history of our Mennonite Church in Holland," or "turning over a new leaf," and especially when one lives among these people from day to day, one feels the immensity of these problems and their far-reaching significance. One thing is certain, the Dutch Mennonites are glad we have come, and expect of us much more than help through clothing and shoes. If they can learn something from the Mennonites of Canada and United States, if they can be strengthened in their new ventures by our mere presence among them, it is certain beyond a shadow of doubt that we can learn a great deal from them. In this way, by mutual giving and taking, the Brotherhood is extended and Christ's Kingdom furthered.

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Thinking about Relief

THE EFFECT OF THE WAR ON THE MENNONITES IN HOLLAND

By John E. Bender

Germany invaded the Netherlands May 10 to 14, 1940. V-E Day came for the Netherlands on May 5, 1945. During those five years the Mennonites, along with the other people of Holland, suffered loss of life, material destruction, damage to their health and wealth, and the less tangible psychological effects of war on the citizen. These various effects are summarized below.

Property Destruction

The first property destruction came with the 1940 Blitz. Rotterdam, one of the cities bombed, was reduced practically to rubble by German bombing, and on the last day, May 14, the beautiful old Mennonite church was completely destroyed. Homes, too, were destroyed during this first brief phase, although the exact number has not been reported.

Then, from 1940 until D Day in June of 1944, Holland remained entirely in German hands and what destruction occurred came mainly from Allied bombing of Dutch industrial targets and port areas. Fortunately, the damage during this period was relatively slight, but several churches, including the one at Vlissingen (Flushing) on Walcheren Island and numerous homes were destroyed.

From June until September, 1944, the Allies invaded the Netherlands from the south and won back approximately one-fourth of Holland's area. Since most of the Holland Mennonites lived outside of the area of fighting, in the northwestern and northern coastal provinces of South Holland, North Holland, Friesland, and Groningen, they escaped the large share of the damage caused by the advancing armies. Nevertheless, some Mennonite communities were caught in the advance, and at Nijmegen and Arnhem, both centers of severe fighting, many homes were destroyed and the Mennonite church in each city leveled to the ground. At much the same period, in the province of Zeeland, the church and parsonage at Aardenburg and the church at Goes were heavily damaged. The breaching of the dikes on Walcheren Island by the English, and the subsequent flooding of the Island caused serious property damage. And at some time along the line from June, 1944, to May, 1945, the church at Wageningen was destroyed in Gelderland and the new parsonage at Heerlen in Limburg heavily damaged.

In all, now, reports have been received in this country from only twenty-five of the 134 Mennonite communities in Holland. When the final damage is reported and totaled the list may easily run to a dozen churches and hundreds of homes destroyed and damaged.

A summary statement of the damage and plans for the future have been given in a Circular Letter dated June 14, 1945, addressed to the **Broederschap** (Brotherhood). In this letter the A.D.S. reported that "in 1940 the **Broederschap** suffered heavy damage; 1944 and 1945 have increased these figures still more. Now an estimate can be made; at this time, too, definite relief can be organized."

The letter continues with the plan of the A.D.S. to collect complete information about the extent of damage from each congregation and also the extent of the contribution each can make to the necessary reconstruction work, both of churches and homes. Plans call for a fund to be set up for such reconstruction. The conclusion mentions the offer of the American Mennonites to help the Dutch Mennonites in their need, and their thankfulness "for this spontaneous expression of brotherliness."

Loss of Life

As in the case of property damage, the record of loss of life suffered during the war is not yet complete, but advance reports indicate deaths have been frequent. In a letter to America, dated June 12, 1945, S. H. N. Gorter reported that "we went through a very difficult period, especially the past winter and this spring, when all of us were tormented by a constant hunger. Many members of our communities, particularly here in the western part of Holland, died, especially old people," and "many of our numbers have been carried off as forced labourers or prisoners to Germany and a great number of them have died in the concentration camps. We fear that two of our ministers belong to the latter. A student of our Mennonite college died there." A number of young Dutch Mennonites were active in the Underground Resistance movement, and some lost their lives there, among them Gysbert Gorter,

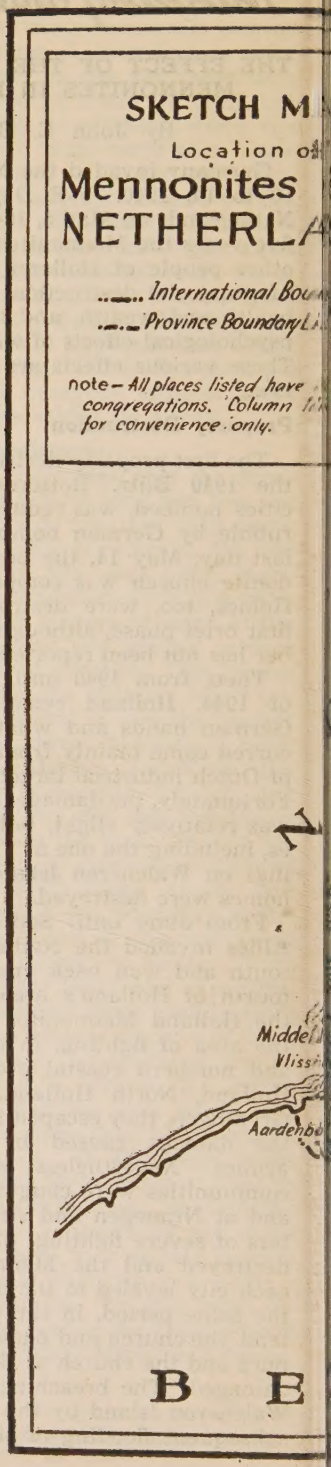
(Continued on page 6)

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The map of Holland printed here indicates the location of all six of the Dutch Mennonite congregations, based on the *Doopsgezind Jaarboekje* for 1940, the official yearbook of the Dutch Mennonite churches. The map sketch was prepared by Henry Meyers, C.P.S. assignee, under the direction of the Relief Research Office at Akron.

According to the 1940 *Jaarboekje* there are 134 organized Mennonite congregations in the Netherlands with 44,585 adult members. Most of these churches are urban and, very interestingly, vary in size almost in direct proportion to the population of the cities in which they are located. The largest congregation is at Amsterdam with a listed membership of 7,781. The membership of other leading congregations is as follows: Haarlem, 4,608; 's Gravenhage, 3,020; Rotterdam, 1,252; Leeuwarden, 1,250; Groningen, 1,142; Utrecht, 1,030; Arnhem, 912; Alkmaar, 912; Zaandam-West, 763; Aalsmeer, 721; Burg-Waal, 670.

A glance at the map will reveal that Mennonite congregations are concentrated in northern Holland, particularly in the provinces of Friesland and Noord Holland. These areas, although occupied, did not have to bear the brunt of military destruction as did the southern provinces. Mennonite church buildings and parsonages destroyed or severely damaged were all located in southern provinces of the Netherlands or on the estuary of the Rhine. Mennonite churches destroyed were at Rotterdam, Arnhem, Wageningen, Nijmegen, and at Vlissingen (Flushing); church buildings or parsonages were severely damaged at Aardenburg, Goes, and Heerlen.



West Frisian Islands
Ternaard
Zwaagwesteinde
Noordhorn
Leermens
Midwolda
Noordbroek
Vrouwenparochie
Sappemeer
Oude Bildtzijl
Tjalleberd
Bolsward
Oldeboorn
Dantumawoude
Warkum
Koudum
Molkwerum
Stavoren
Blokzijl
Monnikendam
Grafdijk
Knollendam
Wormerveer
Westzaan
Attema
Terschelling
Nes
Kolvend
Hallum
Uithuizen
Middelstum
Gripskerk
Pieterzijl
Ems
Emden
Leer
GRONINGEN
GRONINGEN
St. Anna Parochie
Veenwouden
Harlingen
LEEUWARDEN
Franeker
Makkum
Grouw
Witmarsum
Drachten
Veendam
Winschoten
Oude Pekela
Waal Burg
Hoorn
FRIESLAND
Warns
Sneek
Witveen
Gorredijk
Bovenknijpe
Wolsum
Lijst
Joure
Terhorne
Akkrum
Assen
Stadskanaal
Warga
Balk
Heerenveen
Wolvega
Mensingeweer
Helder
Wieringen
Hippolytushoef
Medemblik
Niedorp
Irnsum
DRENTHE
Emmen
Hindeloopen
Steenwijk
Giethoorn
NORTH EAST POLDER
Meppel
Zwartsluis
Enkhuizen
Hoorn
IJSSELMEER
NOORD HOLLAND
Kampen
Zwolle
OVERIJSSEL
Alkmaar
De Rijp
Beemster
Edam
Krommenie
Purmerend
Landsmeer
Koog
Broek
Beverwijk
Zaandam
Middelie
IJmuiden
AMSTERDAM
NETHERLANDS
Almelo
Borne
Hengelo
HAARLEM
Deventer
Bussum
Apeldoorn
Enschede
Zutphen
Aalsmeer
Hilversum
Baarn
Amersfoort
GELDERLAND
Leiden
ZUID HOLLAND
Utrecht
Zeist
's Gravenhage
Gouda
UTRECHT
Delft
ROTTERDAM
Arnhem
Winterswijk
Waageningen
River
Nijmegen
Rhine
Dordrecht
River
Meuse
Berlikum
Zijpe
Breda
NOORD BRABANT
Goes
Eindhoven
Zuid-Limburg
GERMANY
BELGIUM

MENNONITES IN HOLLAND

(Continued from page 3)

the son of S. H. N. Gorter and a young man of great promise, and two nephews of Frits Kuiper, leader in the Gemeentedag youth movement. Other civilians no doubt were killed or wounded through bombing or the advance of the armies.

Public Health

Malnutrition, disease, shortage of supplies—these were the common experiences of hundreds of thousands of Dutch people during that last year of war, and Mennonites no doubt suffered along with the rest, as the Gorter letter, referred to above, mentions. Particularly severe was the suffering in the great port and industrial centers of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague, Haarlem, and Utrecht, where Mennonites have large congregations.

Religious Effects of the War

It is impossible to assess accurately the effects of the five years of war and German occupation on the religious life and thinking of the Dutch Mennonites, but some indications have been received from various reports made by the Dutch themselves.

One rather natural effect has been the strengthening of the sense of unity and brotherhood by the sharing of common trials. In the last of a series of circular letters issued by the A. D. S. to its member congregations, dated May, 1945, this effect has been summarized: "It is certain that this time of war has been beneficial to our Brotherhood. . . . We have come to a stronger realization that we belong together. . . . The congregations have supported each other and carried each other's burdens. The well known admonition: 'Be ye doers of the word' found manifold application in our circles."

Another important effect has been a revival of faith in God. In a letter addressed to American Mennonite leaders, dated June 12, S. H. N. Gorter reported: "But we have come through these terrible years, and in our communities a strong revival could be noticed. Seeing that this world disappointed so earnestly, and men showed themselves from such a bad side, there were a great many people who looked elsewhere for their consolation and returned to God, Who did not withhold his blessing."

Of particular concern to American Mennonites has been the effect of the war on the promising Gemeentedag movement. Here the outlook seems optimistic. T. O. M. H. Hylkema, the leader of the movement, in a letter, dated June 25, reports that the A.D.S. is no longer as "modern" as it once was: "they appreciate now more the Mennonite churches abroad." The time is ripe for reviving the traditional Mennonite faith, he writes, "We all feel that we stand for a new time, that the old things cannot go on much longer." And in proposing an international Mennonite center at Amsterdam, Hylkema comments: "We need here a center of Mennonite life, confessing Christ as He is given to us in the Holy Scripture and according to the Mennonite understanding of what He and the Scriptures ask from His Church; confessing also the necessity of all life in His service by serving each other, even the enemy, therefore keeping principally to nonresistance, against what the world is saying and doing." He admits, however, that the number of Dutch Mennonite ministers sharing the belief in nonresistance is small, mentioning by name J. N. Leendertz of Haarlem and Frits Kuiper of Alkmaar, the leader of the Gemeentedag youth movement.

Conclusion

Although the Dutch Mennonites have suffered greatly through destruction of property, loss of life, and damage to their health and economic affairs, the net effect of the war on their religious life may have been beneficial, judging from the reports which have come to hand. This is a time of opportunity for American Mennonites to make their witness of the faith which they have preserved these 250 years. With witness in one hand and relief in the other, the program of the M.C.C. for the Mennonites of Holland may well provide a testimony of faith and works that will act as a leaven among our co-religionists across the sea.

LETTER FROM WINSCHOTEN

(Continued from page 7)

dispensable blessing for you and end with brotherly greetings.

In the name of the church council of the Mennonist community,

(Signed) E. Addinga, Chairman,
H. C. Baumann, Secretary

P.S. This letter was prepared some days ago and just in these days we had bad news: a chaplain of the army reported, after an inspection of the Belsen camp, that our minister died. We are looking for further information but we abandon all hope of seeing back A. du Croix.

Letter from Winschoten

This letter was mailed at Winschoten, Holland, on June 18, 1945, and was received at Akron, July 21. It came as the second direct reply to the postcard M. C. Lehman sent to the postmaster at Middelburg on January 30, 1945, requesting that he deliver it to any Mennonite community thereabout. (See July issue of BULLETIN *for first reply.) Winschoten is a town located in the southeastern section of the province of Groningen.—Editor.*

Dearly beloved Brethren:

After the northern part of our dearly beloved country had—God be thanked!—been delivered, our church council received a message from our brethren in the southern part, dated Whitsuntide, 1945. Since September, 1944, when our country became a battlefield, we have been separated from our brothers in the south, also we almost completely got out of touch with other communities as all means of communication had fallen out.

Great was our joy and thankfulness when we received this kind and brotherly greeting from our friends. It is light to seek each other again and to bend down before the Lord together with everything which makes our hearts full. He alone knows what all of us suffered this past winter on both sides of the front. He accepts our thanks and consoles those who stand so much in need.

We cannot find words to describe how deep our emotion was when we received a postcard sent to the postmaster of Middelburg, coming from our brothers of North America and directed to the Mennonites in liberated territory. For this deep-felt proof of compassion from the Mennonites across the ocean, we thank God.

Pastor Imprisoned

Our community has suffered severely during the war through the fate that befell our minister, A. du Croix. As far as he was able he gave help and support during the German occupation to all who needed it. This was the cause for which he was imprisoned in April, 1944. At first he was put into the prison at Groningen for some months. Afterwards his fate led him to the concentration camp at Vught in Holland. At the time of the Allied invasion in Brabant in September, 1944, he was transported to the concentration camp at Oranienburg, near Berlin. For several months we were not in touch with him but by the end of November, 1944, we got to know of his whereabouts in Germany. During several months we then succeeded in stealthily providing him with parcels of food through a sister of our community. At the end of January, 1945, however, we quite lost view of him again. Probably he was then transported to another camp in Germany, owing to the Russian advance towards Berlin.

Up to this moment we have received no further news from him. We pray to God for his safe return to his family and his community. Our minister is 34 years old. His youthful wife, together with her two children, went to live with her parents in Friesland in September, 1944. Not until some weeks after the liberation of our native country did she return. Meanwhile she gave birth to a third child, a girl, in November, 1944.

Parsonage Robbed

Shortly before our liberation the parsonage was robbed by the Germans and some Dutch collaborators. The furniture and the library of our minister have been left almost untouched, but for the rest, nothing has remained in the house. So it is uninhabitable and from sheer necessity she is staying with friends. She misses all her linen, bedding, clothes, and boots of the whole family, kitchen utensils, dinner set, and other crockery, victuals, in short everything that is wanted in a household.

It is impossible for the people here to help her to recover necessities. Since several years past we have not been able to buy anything in the shops. Those who have not been injured by the war, also have not been able to buy anything during five years and have had to do with what they had in store. Hence things are scarce with them as well. Throughout the country the need is great and even with everybody's assistance it would be impossible to help the minister's wife adequately.

In our community of 150 members we regret to report that one brother fell for his native country, and another lost his life in the concentration camp at Amersfoort. One sister and some brothers were locked up for several weeks in the prison and others for several months in a concentration camp. They all returned safe and sound, the second of the undersigned among them. We pray to God for His in-

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Russian Mennonite Refugees in Holland

The following account of a visit to a group of Russian Mennonites, interned in a repatriation camp at Maastricht, Holland, is taken from a letter written by Peter Dyck from Amsterdam, August 15. It supplements the cable he sent on the same day announcing the presence of these Mennonite refugees in the Netherlands.—Editor.

We first read about Mennonites from Russia being in a repatriation camp in Holland in a small daily newspaper. These people, thirty-three in all: eleven men, eleven women, and eleven children, come from a village in Chortitza from which they had to evacuate at the time of the German invasion of Russia. Apparently the men were not forced into the services but had to do some noncombatant work for the armed forces. They were glad to be out of the hands of the Russians but when the Nazis tricked them out of their few remaining belongings, mostly horses and wagons, and when they received no food from them, they took to begging.

They are truly like sheep in a wilderness and the women of thirty-six years look much more like fifty years. They told me that if I thought that I and my parents had witnessed terrible times in Russia during the revolution and the subsequent years of famine, they could assure me that that was mild in comparison to what followed since 1927 when we left Russia. They told about one tragedy after another and it appears, if what they say is to be taken as representing the whole of the country and our people there and not only a section, that most of our Mennonites have perished.

One family in this group got lost and in the course of straying away from them eventually found herself in a camp (Lage) somewhere in Germany where she was with some 800 to 1,000 other Mennonites fleeing from Russia. It was in this camp that she had occasion to see and hear Benjamin Unruh. (I say "she" because the children are small and there is no father. The mother told the story.)

Their names are typical Russian Mennonite names: Bergen, Radikop, Hamm, Giesbrecht, Wall, Krugel, Pauls, Gunther and Siemens. They came here claiming to be Dutch and speaking the Dutch language, but we know how distant all that is. The newspaper article stated that they had left Holland 150 years ago and had now "returned to their homeland." The officials asked students of languages and dialects to come and hear the extraordinary language these people spoke. For a minute or two we, that is Dr. Hylkema, Dr. Craandijk and myself, tried a bit of German, some Dutch, a little English, and I even attempted Russian, but not until I began in Low German, the familiar "Platt-Deutsch" did they understand. In all probability, they, like myself, had ancestors who came from Holland but migrated to Prussia-Poland about the 16th Century and then, 150 years ago, from there to Russia at the time of Catherine.

It is interesting to know that with all the frontier restrictions and difficulties of obtaining passes from one country to another and despite the fact that the connection which these people have with Holland is very distant indeed they nevertheless managed to get some authority on their side who allowed them to enter Holland. They were terribly afraid that they would be sent back to Russia; but now they are safe. Our meeting with them for two days has encouraged them and restored some hope to their shattered lives.

As matters stand at the moment the repatriation office is looking after them in a schoolhouse, together with many other people, in Maastricht. The Dutch Mennonites are trying to find a house for them, perhaps one of their "Bruderschaftshauser," where they can live and do some work for the next few months. The only alternative to this is to billet them into private families among our own Mennonites here but that would be difficult on account of their large families and the fact that they do not want to be separated. One way or the other, they will be cared for for some months. But after that what then? Personally I do not think that they would be happy here because the Dutch Mennonites are not like these people in so many ways. This is quite naturally so, but in Canada, where they have relatives and where there is land, they could begin once more. Apart from the factor of acclimatization I have been told on good authority that there would be no possibility whatsoever for these people to acquire land, they could work on the land, but only as labourers for others. The land shortage is very acute here. While you and Brother Klassen investigate what can be done for them we will do all we can for them here by assisting them with clothing, shoes, and other necessities which we can supply.